

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Hertingfordbury Cowper Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	Birch Green Hertford SG14 2LR
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese/Methodist District	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade:	Outstanding
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust/ federation	N/A
Date/s of inspection	20 October 2016
Date of last inspection	September 2011
School's unique reference number	117563
Headteacher	Alison Richards
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Hertingfordbury Cowper is a one form entry village school serving an area between Hertford and Welwyn Garden City. There are 210 pupils on roll, including 11 morning nursery children, who are mainly from a White British background. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding or for whom English is not their first language, is below average. There have been recent changes in staffing, which includes the senior management team.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Hertingfordbury Cowper as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher and all her staff are unwavering in their Christian dedication and passion to personally serve the children and their families.
- The quality of the children's religious literacy richly supports their spiritual journey in this church school. As such, it makes a significant contribution to the school's Christian character.
- The strong music tradition in this school enriches the worshipping life of this church school, nurturing the personal and spiritual lives of this Christian community.

Areas to improve

- Extend the assessment of religious education [RE] across all year groups to encompass the new RE curriculum with its focus on 'Understanding Christianity'.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

The Christian character of Hertingfordbury Cowper Primary School [HCPS] sustains a very high profile. This school consistently and constantly lives out its vision to 'aim high, build confidence and love learning' within a nurturing Christian family community. This is because the unswerving Christian dedication and passion the headteacher and all her staff have in personally serving the children and their families. As a result of the school's strong Christian ethos which shines out, HCPS welcomed several very vulnerable families who have relocated. These families benefitted from the warmth, stability and sense of belonging which HCPS offered to them in their short stay with the school. This is indicative of the response of this supportive Christian community, which is extended to all. Attendance is very good, and children positively skip into school. The school attributes this to the importance of koinonia, the Greek word for coming together in fellowship. As a result, nurture groups and Forest School are making a real difference to those who may be struggling. Exclusions are rare because the school firmly believes in the Christian value of forgiveness and the importance of fresh starts. Data shows a very positive picture, with the school performing well above local and national averages for all year groups. There have been consistently high results for the last three years. HCPS attributes this to their commitment to a growth mind set approach. This enables children to learn through having a go, develop and become more resilient as well as their Christian values permeating everything they do. The commitment to individual children and their needs is very strong. Within a spirit of honesty and integrity, HCPS helps them to find their place within the school community. The school's strong Christian character makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. An excellent example is cited by one parent whose daughter joined the school in Year 3 from a speech and language unit, who praised the school for enabling her daughter to take a solo in the school's production, saying, 'you and your team have helped her to find her voice'. The Christian value of the month, such as trust, is linked to a Bible verse and clearly displayed on classroom doors. HCPS is a 'Rights Respecting' school. RE has made a good contribution to this aspect of the curriculum and has helped children better understand the rights of every child, no matter what their creed or colour. As such, this has helped the children to focus on Christian values at a global level. In addition, the school has growing links with a school, church and orphanage in South Africa, as well as developing links with Malawi. Consequently, these partnerships are nurturing pupils' global awareness and their understanding of diverse communities and cultures. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development is nurtured through a focus on outdoor learning in God's creation. In addition, cross-curricular events, such as the whole school Pentecost and Easter experiences make a good contribution to RE.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Biblically based and inspiring worship, which engages adults and children alike, enables the whole community of HCPS to grow spiritually and to flourish. As such, this makes an excellent contribution to the school's Christian character. For example, pupils say, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego really trusted in God. We need to trust in what we believe in'. In addition, a strong music tradition enriches this school's worshipping life, with the school orchestra taking a leading role. Pupils say, 'when we sing *The Lord's my shepherd*, it shows God's always there and looks after you'. There are excellent links with St Mary's Church, through its priest-in-charge, who is an important member of the school team, pastorally concerned for parents, pupils and staff. He leads school worship fortnightly as does the parish worker and every Wednesday he leads worship for the nursery and Reception children. Consequently, even at this young age, pupils are aware of the symbolism of Jesus as 'the light of the world'. End of term services held at St Mary's Church are well attended by parents. The school orchestra leads the songs, with readings and prayers written by the children. Pupils say they find worship in church 'quiet and calm and feels more holy'. They go on to say, 'St Mary's has signs that remind us how important God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are and helps me to understand and learn more'. Parents and governors say they value the Lord's Prayer being signed in worship. Prayer is integral to the worshipping life of HCPS. An excellent example is the 'I pray your prayer' prayer wall inspired by art work from Tate St Ives. As a result, pupils, staff and parents wrote prayers on brightly coloured ribbons which were shared with the whole community and then distributed to be prayed by others. This year the focus is on inviting everyone to contribute to a blossoming 'friendship flower'. Year 5 and 6 pupils help plan, lead and evaluate worship as members of the collective worship committee. School council and pupil voice also inform the evaluation of worship. As a result of listening to different viewpoints, worship now takes place just before break, so pupils can continue to reflect on the Bible stories and the Christian values they contain. Pupils are able to make links with everyday life and with other subject areas, such as mathematics and PE, not just RE. Pupils are growing in their understanding of the importance of the Holy Trinity and have been helped by the church team. Consequently, pupils say, 'It is a mystery that cannot be explained easily. God the Father is everywhere.

Jesus [the Son] is a miracle maker. The Holy Spirit is a spirit in our hearts. It tells us that Jesus died to save us and God truly loves us. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to give hope to those who had none’.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE now has a very high profile, with a whole school focus on quality RE. This is because RE is now led and managed by a former head of an outstanding school. Lesson observations take place, however, not as frequently as other core subjects. Last year’s book scrutinies with a focus on learning from religion, showed, across all year groups, this was good or outstanding. Assessment and tracking are in place, also informed by pupil voice. Newly qualified staff work alongside experienced teachers and all receive training from the RE subject leader, designed to raise RE’s status. Consequently, the RE action plan and annual RE review are discussed with governors and are designed to aim high and help build confidence. Tasks are creative and engaging and well matched to pupils’ abilities. As a result, teaching and learning in RE are consistently good and often outstanding, with all pupils making good progress over time and some pupils making excellent progress by the time they reach Year 6. This is enriched by an excellent programme of RE days, Christian visitors and visits to St Mary’s Church and St Albans Abbey. As befits a church school, pupils also learn about and respect faiths other than Christianity, such as Judaism and Islam. Year 1 pupils focus on Christians showing their thankfulness to God by being generous to those who have little. They reflect on Harvest offerings and giving to the local food bank, following Jesus’s commandment in that, ‘Freely you have received, freely give’. Pupils at HCPS have an excellent level of religious literacy, which makes a rich contribution to their SMSC development and to the school’s Christian character. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE. Importantly, all staff have received training from the diocesan RE adviser on the new resource, ‘Understanding Christianity’. As a result, Year 6 pupils can ask, ‘What kind of king is King Jesus?’ when studying the Kingdom of God. They speak of ‘love coming down at Christmas’, making the link to Jesus as king of the Kingdom of God. They discuss aspects of the kingdom, such as beauty, justice, reconciliation and wholeness. The bar has been set high for higher order thinking skills, not just in RE but in other subjects. Consequently, pupils accurately cite chapter and verse in Bible passages, making the connection with the parable of the mustard seed. They note the parable of the great feast and what heaven must be like, with ‘no war, death, fear or suffering’. The RE action plan has already identified extending the assessment of RE in encompassing the new RE curriculum with its focus on Understanding Christianity across all year groups. In addition, extending the programme of visits and visitors to include those of other faiths to support pupils’ spiritual and cultural development has also been accurately identified.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding

Christian values absolutely underpin school policies and the school’s development plan just as prayer underpins the work of the governing body. This stems from the strong Christian conviction of the headteacher and this passion and dedication is shared by her staff. Two years ago the focus for a staff training day was ‘Flying High’. This was instrumental in teachers reflecting on their own practice to enable children to fly high and work at excellence in all areas, so this church school is honouring to God. Consequently, staff say they are proud to work in a school that makes a positive difference to children’s lives, with children thriving and achieving very well within a strong Christian framework. They say that, ‘HCPS is my family. It is the place where we come to share our love of learning, our love of God, and our love for each other’. They go on to say that, ‘it is a privilege to be part of a team which makes learning fun, engaging and exciting, encompassing God in every aspect of school life. It is a blessing to work in’. Governors are committed to the wellbeing of all, and support the professional development of staff. The two deputy heads who have been in post for just over a year have made their mark as excellent role models. The headteacher ‘has a passion for recognising the potential in others’, leading to strategically planned training and professional development. Consequently, one of the former teaching assistants is now one of the deputies, and lectures in science at the University of Hertfordshire. Staff and governors have benefitted from diocesan training, with all areas addressed from the last inspection and a vision for the future. Governors are committed to their role of monitoring worship through governor visits and the Christian ethos group. RE is monitored by the RE subject leader with the link governor, who is the priest-in-charge, through the Christian ethos group, and discussions on how the schemes of work fit across the year groups at the education committee. RE and worship therefore both meet statutory requirements. Community links are strong, with Mini Cowpers meeting on site, the school choir singing for elderly residents and the orchestra performing at village events. Parents value that ‘faith is talked about here’, and the fact that HCPS provides ‘all you need for life, to get on with

people, have a good grounding and principles'. They speak highly of the school's pastoral care and of the priest-in charge as 'amazing', with some families now becoming regular churchgoers.

SIAMS report October 2016 Hertingfordbury Cowper CE VA Primary School, Birch Green SG14 2LR